

# Coming of the War Between the States

## An Interpretation

By AVERY CRAVEN

When Lee surrendered at Appomattox a tall gaunt North Carolinian stolidly stacked arms and fell back into line.<sup>1</sup> He was worn, hungry, and dirty. The insistent Yankees had granted him little time during the past weeks for relaxation. Food had been scarce; the opportunities for cleanliness lacking. He had gone on fighting more from habit than purpose. He had quit because the orders were to that effect. Suddenly, with a sharp realization of what was taking place around him, he turned to his neighbor and drawled: "Damn me if I ever love another country!"

In these words the disheartened Tarheel passed judgment on a generation.

Up to 1825 there had been no "United South" nor no "self-conscious North." There were some recognizable differences between these larger sections, in climate, in economic interests, in ideals, and in those intangible things which go to make "a way of life." But these differences were of long standing and were no more acute than those existing between other geographic regions within the nation. With a population ever on the move toward the West or the city, new and old societies constantly found themselves bound together under the same political organization. With highly diversified natural resources, conflicting types of economic endeavor grew up, side by side, to contend for favorable

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the meeting of the American Historical Association, Chattanooga, Tennessee, December 27, 1935.

legislation. Social patterns brought into new lands from different sources fought for dominance. The struggle for control in governments, where majorities ruled, forms the central theme in more than one era of the nation's history.

Nor were the sections units. The careful scholar must ever recognize the cleavage between Upper and Lower New England; between the Ohio Valley and the lake region of the Old Northwest; between the mountains and the bluegrass of Kentucky and Tennessee.<sup>2</sup> He must understand the basic differences between the "tidewater districts" and the "upcountry" in the Old South. He must know that before 1860 every issue which later divided North and South had been fought out and reduced to a workable compromise by Southern men struggling against Southern men in Virginia and the Carolinas—the rights of minorities, the distribution of power between local and central governments, the relative values of a single economic effort as against diversification secured by tariffs and other legislative aids, even the problem of free and slave labor!

Differences—economic, social, and political—did not then or afterwards portend an "irrepressible conflict" between North and South, to be settled only by bloodshed. The War Between the States in 1861-1865 did not come simply because one section was agricultural and the other industrial; because one exploited free labor and the other slaves; or because a sectional majority refused to respect the constitutional rights of the minority! The Northwest was as thoroughly agricultural as the South; the Republican party was vigorous in disclaiming abolition tendencies and was willing to leave slavery alone where it was; the minority has never found the constitution of much value in the face of "manifest destinies." The problem of why these sections went to war lies deeper. It is one of emotions, cultivated hostilities, and ultimately of hatred between sections. Bloodshed was "necessary" because men associated their rivals with disliked and dishonorable symbols, and crowned their own interests with moral sanctions. Differences were but

<sup>2</sup> There are, in fact, three units in each of these states.

the materials with which passions worked. Each side, in the end, fought the other for principles and the glory of God, for the preservation of civilizations, for the maintenance of honor. The conflict was the work of politicians and pious cranks! The peoples knew little of each other as realities. They were both fighting mythical devils.

The steps by which sectional differences were emotionalized are highly involved and often obscure. Of one thing only can we be reasonably certain: The first apprehensions and resentments which stirred the people in each section were the product of purely local conditions. We can understand the national situation only when we have grasped the vital forces at work in each locality. Men react to what they know—they create their symbols from such experiences. But they shed blood for and against abstractions which better carry all the good and all the evils which they imagine possible from their limited experiences. We must begin with everyday affairs in each section.

The general period in American history from 1825 to 1860 was one of vast material growth and expansion. But it was also one in which the wealth and power of the few grew disproportionately to that of the many. Democracy was not functioning properly. *Liberty* was putting an end to *equality*. If some were content, others felt deepest resentments and dreamed of a more perfect society as the political and moral right of an American. It is sometimes difficult to discover whether this claim rested on the Constitution, the Scriptures, or the Declaration of Independence. Perhaps they did not make such unimportant distinctions. But at any rate injustice, lack of material prosperity, loss of equality or failure to achieve American purposes—all became matters of moral significance and evidence of God's plan thwarted. It was on the one hand, a day of pulling down aristocrats, fighting devils, saving democratic institutions, acquiring material things as a natural and moral right; and on the other, of checking harebrained movements which threatened social security, private rights, and private property.

In the Northeast the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. Old commercial centers and fishing villages found themselves overshadowed by a new life which grew up at the fall line. The city became a land

of opportunity—the center of a varied and attractive life. Wealth shifted into new hands and new places. Labor became dependent on capital. Dominance in legislative halls passed from farmers, merchants, and fishermen to industrial leaders and the lawyers they sent to do their bidding. Daniel Webster's conversion from free trade to protection was only a larger manifestation of a common phenomenon. The harbor was passing into eclipse.<sup>3</sup>

Along side of these urban changes went an agricultural revolution as significant in effects. For the first time the farmers of this region had expanding markets of their own. Opportunities for specialized crops which could feed both men and machines brought capital into farming, crowded out the less efficient, and often set sheep, as in Old England, "to gobbling up" their farms and villages. Thousands, unwilling or unable to make the required adjustments, turned cityward or toward the New West from which they soon poured floods of agricultural produce to plague those who remained behind. Every decade held a crisis for those who tilled the soils of New England and Upper New York. The abandoned farm became the symbol of permanent decline.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile a series of Wests were rising one after the other in the great region which stretched from New York to the Mississippi—"a greater New England," the Ohio Valley, the Old Northwest. Each began as a frontier but hurried on as rapidly as exploitation of natural resources could accomplish the task toward a more perfect and complex society. Their citizens had sacrificed the present for future returns which depended on easy access to rich lands and open ways to profitable

<sup>3</sup> Caroline F. Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture, a Study of Industrial Beginnings* (Boston, 1931); Victor S. Clark, *History of Manufactures in the United States, 1607-1860* (Washington, 1916), 367-68; Arthur B. Darling, *Political Changes in Massachusetts, 1824-1848, a Study of Liberal Movements in Politics* (New Haven, 1925), 16-17; Raynor G. Wellington, *The Political and Sectional Influence of the Public Lands, 1828-1842* (Boston, 1914), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Perry W. Bidwell, "The Agricultural Revolution in New England," *American Historical Review*, XXVI (1921), 683-98; *New England Farmer*, XVII (1838), 113; II (1823), 122-23; IV (1825), 212-13; Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1860; Avery O. Craven, "The Abandoned Farms of New England," *American Historical Association Report*, 1922, I, 353-54.

markets. Their hopes ever outran their realizations but their faith in the dividends of democracy did not decline. They were American pioneers and they had a right to prosper and would do so if democracy functioned properly. But the Panic of '37 spread wreck and ruin among them; land legislation lagged behind their demands; internal improvements came all too slowly; prices slumped as home markets broke and "overproduction" glutted the few outside markets they had developed. Throughout the "middle period" this was a region of half-realized purposes, of extravagant dreams checked by hard raw realities; of plain men who sought consolation and found emotional outlet in evangelical churches; of earnest souls who, here and there, even talked with God. All things, economic as well as social, were either "right" or "wrong." And too many things in this period were "wrong."<sup>5</sup>

The rural North, therefore, throughout the era, was a region of potential and actual unrest. The "average farmer," for whose welfare the American system had been established, resented bitterly the growing importance of the city and the mounting wealth of those engaged in what he considered "minor pursuits." Securing the support of the lesser folk of the towns, only recently come from nearby farms, he launched his protests in various forms, but all in the name of a faltering democracy. The labor movements of the period, says Commons, were "not so much the modern alignment of wage-earner against employer" as they were the revolts of "the poor against the rich, the worker against the owner."<sup>6</sup> Professor Darling has shown that the "Workingmen's Movement" in Massachusetts was almost exclusively a farmers' effort—"a protest against the 'accumulations' in Bostonian society, the assault of 'country folk' on the 'exclusive privileges' of the wealthy."<sup>7</sup> The bitter

<sup>5</sup> Frederick J. Turner, *The United States, 1830-1850* (New York, 1935), 253-351; Avery O. Craven, "The Advance of Civilization into the Middle West in the Period of Settlement," in Dixon R. Fox (ed.), *Sources of Culture in the Middle West, Backgrounds versus Frontier* (New York, 1934), 39-71.

<sup>6</sup> John R. Commons and Helen L. Sumner (eds.), *Labor Movement, 1820-1840* (*Documentary History of American Industrial Society* [Cleveland, 1910], V), I, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur B. Darling, "The Workingmen's Party in Massachusetts, 1833-1834," *American Historical Review*, XXIX (1924), 81-86; *id.*, *Political Changes in Massachusetts, 1824-1848*, p. 3.

New England farmer who declared he would "sooner, infinitely sooner, follow [his] daughters to the grave than see them 'go out to service' " in the kitchens of those "who by successful industry, by good luck, or possibly fraud were in a situation to make hewers of wood and drawers of water of their less fortunate sisters and brethren," was merely expressing a very prevalent attitude.<sup>8</sup>

The Locofoco groups were even more concerned about inequality and privilege. An Upper New York convention in 1836, "appointed by the farmers, mechanics and others friendly in their views," struck at the "Banking System" because it "filled the coffers of the already wealthy and took from the earnings of the poor." It denounced the practices of "the courts of law" for being "aristocratic"; it declared in form consciously modeled after the Declaration of Independence that "the foundations of Republican Government are in the equal rights of every citizen, in his person and property, and in their management." This group talked much of the "aristocracy of wealth" and "the odious distinctions betwixt the rich and the poor." They would restore democracy by public education and by granting to every man his "inalienable right to a share of the bounties of our Common Father"—meaning the public domain.<sup>9</sup>

It should also be noted that the transcendental protest against materialism took point from the new urban-industrial growth; that Brook Farm, Hopedale, and Fruitlands represented a return to rural-agricultural living; that the well-being of common men in a democracy formed a basic argument for temperance, peace, women's rights, and abolition. Both the misfortunes and the hopes of a disgruntled people were moving under the banners of *democracy*.

To this glorification was soon added another. The cause of the oppressed was also the cause of "righteousness." Rural folk, whose one social center was the church and whose great spokesman was the preacher, could hardly have escaped this conclusion. The great revivals

<sup>8</sup> *New England Farmer*, X (1831), 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> F. Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party* (New York, 1842), 68-69, 71-74, 147-51.

which burned through the back country and in which Charles Grandison Finney was the leader, shifted the emphasis in Calvinism from "a painful quest for a safe escape from life" to the transforming of this world into the Kingdom of Heaven. Salvation was no longer the "end of all human desire"; it was but the beginning of "*being useful in the highest degree possible*."<sup>10</sup> Not only was social reform an obligation but social evils had to do with morality; and the purposes of religion, society, and democratic politics were one and the same. "It is a departure, in our representatives and judges, from the laws of nature and laws of the Creator, which has produced the derangement in the affairs of our State," declared the Locofoco convention referred to above.<sup>11</sup> "To a Believer who has rejoiced in the light of Locofocoism, as an outward sign of the inward light of Christianity,"<sup>12</sup> was the dedication in F. Byrdsall's history of the movement. The *Democratic Review* echoed this sentiment by insisting that ". . . Democracy is the cause of Humanity. . . . It is essentially involved in Christianity, of which it has been well said that its pervading spirit of democratic equality among men is its highest fact."<sup>13</sup> Gerrit Smith's congregation at Peterboro in December, 1840, resolved among other things, that:<sup>14</sup>

Whereas there is, ever amongst professors of religion, a prevailing opinion that it is wrong to preach politics on the Sabbath. *Resolved*, That the correctness of this opinion turns wholly on the character of the politics which are preached; for whilst it is clearly wrong to preach anti-Bible or unrighteous politics on the Sabbath or on any other day, nothing can be clearer than that no day is too holy to be used in preaching the politics which are inculcated in the Bible.

Smith himself declared that "No man's religion is better than his politics." He believed that righteous civil governments depended on "the prevalence of [a] Christianity," which kept from office "anti-abolitionists, and land-monopolists and other enemies of human rights." To

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York, 1933), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 71-74.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in William Trimble, "Diverging Tendencies in New York Democracy in the Period of the Locofocos," *American Historical Review*, XXIV (1919), 396.

<sup>14</sup> Octavius B. Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith, a Biography* (New York, 1909), 62.

leave God out of "a moral reformation" was like enacting "the play of Othello" and leaving "out the part of Othello." To him "Civil Government" was "of God."<sup>15</sup> And Jeffersonian Democracy was God's chosen form of civil government.

In the Northwest the sublimation of local resentments in terms of democracy and morality was even more pronounced. The addition of men and ideas from the Northeast played some part in the formation of attitudes but the expression was largely native. Western men began with the naïve assumption voiced by the members of the Missouri assembly that "Our country is peculiarly the asylum of the oppressed, and emphatically the poor man's home."<sup>16</sup> They were certain that "Every law . . . which opens to the poor man the way to independence . . . not only subserves the cause of Humanity but advances and maintains the fundamental principles of our Government." They believed that "persons . . . disposed to live out of the labors of others" (meaning land speculators) were establishing "a petty aristocracy" which would "choke the tree of Liberty and cause her leaves to wither so that her sons . . . [could] no more recline under her balmy shadows, but . . . [would] be compelled to endure the scorching rays and blasting influences of the slavery making idol of money tyrants."<sup>17</sup> In early days the danger arose from "'Eastern millionaires . . . who like the flies that come upon the borders of Egypt' " caused " 'the land to stink' " but their resentments were vague enough to be lodged in any direction as occasion required.<sup>18</sup> Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan climaxed the argument in favor of settlers by insisting that "we shut our eyes upon the seven hundred per cent., and look to our duty as a Christian people."<sup>19</sup> And a colleague in the House argued that the public lands should go "as God intended, and as good governments and good men desire

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 72, 148-49, 157.

<sup>16</sup> *American State Papers, Public Lands* (Washington), V (1860), 36.

<sup>17</sup> John R. Commons (ed.), *Labor Movement, 1840-1860* (*Documentary History of American Industrial Society* [Cleveland, 1910], VIII), II, 44-45.

<sup>18</sup> George M. Stephenson, *The Political History of the Public Lands from 1840 to 1862* (Boston, 1917), 102.

<sup>19</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., appendix (n. s., XXXI), 1088 (1854).

they should go, into the hands of *the people*.”<sup>20</sup> The significant fact was that here were men who believed in the natural right of settlers to lands and who felt that the failure to secure that right constituted an infringement on democracy and on God’s purposes.

The Jacksonian war against “the money power” in an earlier period was “from this same cloth.” It represented far more the deep resentments of a “grasping” people than it did a belief in abstract ideals. The same holds, in a degree, for the so-called “free-soil” movement. Historians have largely overlooked the fact that the “liberty groups” with a single human rights appeal failed to gain any great following in the Northwest—but that when Salmon P. Chase, the Democrat, broadened the platform to one in which homesteads, internal improvements at Federal expense, and home markets by tariffs, were included, the moral indignation against slavery rose to a burning flame.<sup>21</sup> A local convention in Chicago in 1848 resolved that the Wilmot Proviso “is now and ever has been the doctrine of the Whigs of the free States” and added hastily, “the Whig party has ever been the firm, steady, and unchanging friend of harbor and river appropriations.”<sup>22</sup> Lincoln himself would keep slavery from the territories because God had intended them “for the homes of free white people.”<sup>23</sup> The Wisconsin farmer, whose interest in Negroes was slight, did not further heckle this great Commoner when the assurance was given that the prime purpose behind his program was a 160-acre farm for all interested persons.<sup>24</sup> Thus the halo of democracy and morality, in part borrowed from the abolitionist, was placed upon the brow of all vital Western needs, and its bitterness from unrealized ambitions became a holy sentiment.

<sup>20</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., appendix, 956 (June 10, 1854).

<sup>21</sup> Theodore T. Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (New York, 1897).

<sup>22</sup> *Chicago Journal*, April 3, 1848.

<sup>23</sup> See his speeches at Peoria, October 16, 1854, and at Alton, October 15, 1858, in John G. Nicolay and John Hay (eds.), *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1905), II, 190-262; V, 29-71. See also James G. Randall, “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?” *American Historical Review*, XLI (1936), 270.

<sup>24</sup> Speech at Milwaukee, September 30, 1859, in Nicolay and Hay (eds.), *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, V, 236-56.

The next step in the process was one of transferring the resentment, generated out of local conditions, to the Southern planter, and fashioning him into the great symbol of aristocracy, of immorality, and of disloyalty to democratic government. It began when the evangelical churches accepted slavery as a sin rather than an evil; it reached its climax in the triumph of a political party, purely sectional and openly hostile on moral grounds to the institutions of another section.

The antislavery movement was, in the beginning, part and parcel of the larger humanitarian impulse which got going in the early nineteenth century and which sought to be rid of injustice and to establish a more wholesome social order. It was closely related to the peace movement, the effort for women's rights, the temperance crusade, prison and Sabbath reforms, the improvement of education, and many other efforts of the kind. It rose to particular dominance only gradually and among certain well-defined groups. It was fortunate in leadership but more fortunate in its appeal. Human slavery more clearly violated democratic institutions than any other evil of the day; it was close enough to be touched now and then, yet far enough removed to give widest scope to the imagination; it violated most completely the moral senses of a people whose ideas of sin were largely in terms of self-indulgence and whose purposes in religious expression were toward the social betterment of the downtrodden; and, what was as important, it constituted the most talked-of feature in the life of a rival section long contending for control in a government of majorities. Garrison, who, if living today, could profitably consult a psychiatrist, early denounced slavery as a crime and the slaveholder as a criminal. But, of more reaching consequences were the teachings of Theodore Weld and his type, who as W. C. Preston said, made "the anti-slavery cause identical with religion" and urged men "by all the high and exciting obligations of duty of man to God, by all that can warm the heart and inflame the imagination, to join the pious work of purging the sin of slavery from the land."

It was but a step from such attitudes to the condemnation of Southern men for holding slaves or permitting others to hold them. By 1841

Garrison was speaking of "The desperadoes from the South, in Congress" and declaring that "We would sooner trust the honor of the country . . . in the hands of the inmates of our penitentiaries and prisons, than in their hands. . . . they are the meanest of thieves and the worst of robbers. . . . We do not acknowledge them to be within the pale of Christianity, of republicanism, of humanity."<sup>25</sup> And then finding his hatred not entirely spent he lamented the poverty of the English language which prevented doing full justice to the infamy of the South.<sup>26</sup>

This conception of the slaveholder opened the way for abolition imaginations to create much needed symbols. In a surprisingly short time *all* Southerners, except a few "poor whites," were planters, living in great white-pillared mansions, drinking intemperately, consorting with female slaves, and selling "down river" their own blood without the trace of a civilized blush. "A million and a half slave women, some of them without a tinge of African blood, are given up, a lawful prey to the unbridled lusts of their masters," declared an antislavery tract.<sup>27</sup> A whole section of the nation living upon the toil of a downtrodden race! Here was the aristocrat *par excellence*; the perfection in licentiousness and self-indulgence! Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* pictured a way of life which would have done credit to the romancing of a Thomas Nelson Page; novels, and there were scores of them, like *Our World: or the Slaveholder's Daughter*,<sup>28</sup> pictured a society of licentiousness which must have disturbed the dreams of many an abstemious Puritan. The South had begun to do service for all aristocrats and all sinners in an era of democracy and morality!

Garrison and his kind, of course, were few; his violence was shared by only a handful of antislavery men, who in turn formed a very, very small minority in the North. His attitudes are important only because they were *extreme*, and by their extremeness reveal in clearest

<sup>25</sup> Wendell P. and Francis J. Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879* (New York, 1889), III, 32-33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 57-58.

<sup>27</sup> *Anti-Slavery Tracts*, No. 7, *Revolution the Only Remedy for Slavery* (New York, 1855), published by the American Anti-Slavery Society.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, New York, 1855.

fashion something of what was gradually to seep into the subconsciousness of a whole people. One day, only a few decades off, the moral weaknesses of slaveholding would form a vital part of the understanding of a whole section and hatred of Southerners be so near the surface that "the shedding of a little blood" would set them savagely at the throats of their neighbors.

The next step in the process was one of directly associating the slaveholding South with the economic and social ills from which men of North and West suffered. The "hard times" of the late 1830's, they said, were due to the fact that Northern capital had been loaned to "prodigal" Southern planters who could not and would not repay. "Slavery," said the report of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1837, "is the rule of violence and arbitrary will. . . . It would be quite in character both with its theory and practice . . . if the slave-drivers should refuse to pay their debts and meet the sheriff with dirk and pistol." Three years later the Society resolved "That the existence of Slavery is the grand cause of the pecuniary embarrassments of the Country; and that no real permanent relief is to be expected . . . until the total abolition of that execrable system." One writer estimated that within five years the South had taken "more than \$100,000,000 by notes which will never be paid."<sup>29</sup>

This period saw also the rise of the idea of a "slave-power" or "slaveocracy" which had seized control of the Federal government to shape its policies in the interests of slavery. It had already destroyed "the protective system 'at the hazard, if not with the intention' of breaking up the manufacturing interests of the free states." It had developed and protected markets for cotton "in all parts of the known world, while it studiously avoided doing anything to procure a market for the free products of the grain growing Northwest."<sup>30</sup>

The aggressive opposition of Southern leaders to pre-emption and homestead legislation in the period from 1840 to 1860 added to the

<sup>29</sup> *Free American*, August 19, 1841. See Julian P. Bretz, "The Economic Background of the Liberty Party," *American Historical Review*, XXXIV (1929), 250-64.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* See also G. M. Skinner to Lyman Trumbull, January ?, 1858, W. H. Herndon to Trumbull, February 19, 1858, Trumbull Papers (MSS. in Library of Congress).

growing belief that slave interests were hostile to Western development. A typical point of view was that of Senator James M. Mason of Virginia who declared that he had "not yet known . . . a bill so fraught with mischief, and mischief of the most demoralizing tendency, as the homestead bill."<sup>81</sup> "*The Columbus* [Mississippi] *Democrat* insisted that settlers on homesteads would be abolitionists" and declared that it would be "better for us that these territories should remain a waste, a howling wilderness, trod only by red hunters than be so settled."<sup>82</sup> Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina added insult to injury by implying that a homesteader was a "drone," a man unworthy "of protection in a country where every man goes ahead who has any strength of will, or any firmness, or any character."<sup>83</sup>

Northwestern reaction to such attitudes was sharp and direct. "When did the Senator from Georgia ever vote anything for Iowa or the West?" growled Augustus Caesar Dodge at one who opposed his measures.<sup>84</sup> "I, sir, have inherited my Democracy," said James M. Cavanaugh, member of the House from Minnesota, "have been attached to the Democratic party from my boyhood. . . . But, sir, when I see southern gentlemen come up . . . and refuse . . . to aid my constituents, refuse to place the actual tiller of the soil, the honest, industrious laborer, beyond the grasp and avarice of the speculator, I tell you, sir, I falter and hesitate."<sup>85</sup> The Dubuque (Iowa) *Herald* revealed the emotional extent reached in 1860 in these words: "Last Saturday the old reprobate, who now sits in the Presidential chair at Washington *vetoed the Homestead Bill*. . . . The slave propagandists demanded that the Bill should be vetoed, and their pliant tool was swift to obey them. Let the pimps and hirelings of the old sinner defend this last act of his, if they dare."<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 Sess., Pt. II, p. 1076 (February 17, 1859).

<sup>82</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. III, p. 2304 (May 22, 1858).

<sup>83</sup> July 22, 1854.

<sup>84</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 32 Cong., 2 Sess., appendix, 237-38 (March 18, 1853); Louis Pelzer, *Augustus Caesar Dodge, A Study in American Politics* (Iowa City, 1909), 168.

<sup>85</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 Sess., 505 (January 20, 1859).

<sup>86</sup> Quoted by Stephenson, *Political History of the Public Lands*, 217. See also resolutions passed by Chicago Germans, January 19, 1858, Trumbull Papers.

Even more bitter was the complaint against Southern opposition to river and harbor improvements. "This harbor question," said the *Chicago Democrat* after Polk's veto of a favorable bill, "is not a political one, but a sectional one. It is one between the North and the South. The iron rod wielded over her [the North] by Southern despots must be broken."<sup>87</sup> Another Chicago paper declared:

The North can and will be no longer hoodwinked. If no measure of protection and improvement of anything North or West are to be suffered by our Southern masters, if we are to be downtrodden and all our cherished interests crushed by them, a signal revolution will eventually ensue. The same spirit and energy that forced emancipation for the whole country from Great Britain will throw off the Southern Yoke. . . . The power to oppress shall not again be entrusted to men who have shown themselves to be slave-holders, but not Americans.<sup>88</sup>

A final charge against the so-called "slaveocracy" was the corruption of the Democratic party. When James K. Polk was elected president in 1844, certain old leaders such as Martin Van Buren, Francis Preston Blair, and Thomas H. Benton were pushed aside. Each in turn blamed John C. Calhoun and the slave interests; each in a different way added to the impression that the party was no longer a fit place for those who followed the immortal Andrew Jackson. The antislavery groups darkened the picture, and Whig and Republican partisans completed it. Distrust thus created ended in a widespread belief that the annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott Decision were steps in a well-worked out scheme for the extension of slavery and the rule of the slaveholder. Scholars have revealed the falsity of such opinions yet in the years before the war they served all the purposes of fact and Seward and Lincoln used them as deliberately as did the recognized demagogues. Even John Wentworth, a staunch Northern Democrat, accused his Southern colleagues of always acting as slaveholders, never as party men.<sup>89</sup> By 1860

<sup>87</sup> *Chicago Democrat*, November 10, 1846.

<sup>88</sup> *Chicago Daily Journal*, August 19, 1846.

<sup>89</sup> *Indiana Sentinel*, June 2, 1849.

Wyndham Robertson, looking back at the recent Republican victory, could say: "The possession of the power of the Federal Government by the Democratic party . . . furnished the pretext . . . to confound the whole slave-holding interest as identical with democracy, and thus to turn and direct opposition, for whatever cause, to the policy and acts of the Democratic party, into opposition to the slave-holding interests."<sup>40</sup>

Thus by 1860 the apprehensions and resentments of the North had deepened as they had been sanctified by democracy and morality. That section, striving as it believed, for things truly American, had fallen short of realization because of opposition from aristocratic and ignoble enemies. The time for being firm had arrived. The right to hate had been achieved. And what was as important the South had been fashioned into the perfect symbol of all they feared and all they despised. The extreme abolition picture of what slaveholders might be had been given legal currency by the bombast of politicians in verbal conflict for place and power and favors. They pictured an aggressive interest, wringing great wealth from unwilling and overworked Negroes, bent on extending its system to the ends of the land. They talked of "a house divided against itself"; of "a higher law"; of "the aristocratic lords of slavery." The ends they sought were immediate, but common folk back home, under the sway of unimaginative evangelical clergymen could think only in terms of the eternal verities. In 1854 they created the Republican party which in six short years passed from an expression of the moral indignation of a limited group to the position of carrier of all the material aspirations of a section and the political hopes of most of those not under the Democratic roof. It was the party of homestead legislation—the culmination of America's greatest democratic effort, the fruition of God's purpose, as Senator John P. Hale put it, to have His lands inhabited (and it might be added, a policy made more democratic and more holy by relieving poor settlers from competition with

<sup>40</sup> *Speech of Wyndham Robertson, Esq. of Richmond City, on the State of the Country, delivered in the House of Delegates on March 5th and 6th, 1860* (Richmond, 1860).

slaveholders).<sup>41</sup> It was the party of internal improvements with Federal aid—a policy now embracing a Pacific Railroad along the central route for the upbuilding of Chicago and St. Louis. Lincoln's railroad support in 1860 rivaled that of Douglas and came from lines better placed for future trends than his.<sup>42</sup> It was the party of protective tariffs—a policy lifted by the logic of William H. Seward into the very cornerstone of democratic society. Free farmers and industrialists at last united for common accomplishment! Satisfactory markets and new prosperity for all, including Pennsylvania and Cameron! Here was a program making the Union worth saving; the experiment in democracy would pay sound dividends.

But this was not all. The great ideals of an evangelistic Calvinistic society had not been sacrificed in the turn toward "respectability." In opposing the extension of slavery, the party skillfully capitalized on all the moral indignation long generating against the institution itself. Its leaders disavowed all the political implications of abolition sentiment yet openly announced their personal abhorrence of slaveholding. They even took profit from the few who went further. Charles Sumner's bitter invectives, aimed "to keep alive that old Puritan hatred of wickedness, which must overthrow slavery," were carefully distributed by the machine throughout the rural North.<sup>43</sup> Seward permitted his "higher law" and "irrepressible conflict" doctrines to become "all things to all men." And Lincoln's "ultimate extinction" policy was used to satisfy all but the most extreme abolitionists. The Republican "stock in trade" was indeed, as Caleb Cushing said, "the insolent assumption, in some of them, perhaps, the stupid mental delusion, that whatever view they take of the measures of government *is the only moral side of public questions.*"<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. III, p. 2305 (May 22, 1858).

<sup>42</sup> Jacob R. Perkins, *Trails, Rails and War; the Life of General G. M. Dodge* (Indianapolis, 1929), 57-58.

<sup>43</sup> Laura A. White, "Charles Sumner and the Crisis of 1860-1861," in Avery Craven (ed.), *Essays in Honor of William E. Dodd* by his former students at the University of Chicago (Chicago, 1935), 131-93.

<sup>44</sup> Claude M. Fuess, *The Life of Caleb Cushing* (New York, 1923), II, 207-208n. Italics not in the original.

It was this situation which produced a crisis in the party when Douglas' squatter sovereignty, in practice, yielded only free territory. The danger of slave extension, on which the party was founded, was over. And by 1858 even Republican leaders understood this fact. Some said the party had fulfilled its mission and should join with Stephen A. Douglas in the formation of a new party for wider sectional and national ends. Some talked of a "broad base" by which the Republicans could attack the old Southern Whigs.<sup>45</sup> But Abraham Lincoln, in his "House Divided" speech, prevented himself and his party from being thrust aside by a desperate appeal to old moral foundations. Though *his* own policy and that of "Judge" Douglas gave identical results, the latter was not born of moral conviction. And until the issue was conceived in terms of "the eternal struggle between two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world" the fight must go on. That is why a man who was willing to save the Union at the cost of a bloody civil war, even with slavery untouched, would not save it by a compromise which yielded party principle but which did not sacrifice a single material thing. The party was one with God and the world's great experiment in Democracy.

The Southern side of the story needs only to be suggested.<sup>46</sup> Rural and lacking in means for the easy creation and expression of public opinion, the section was ever peculiarly susceptible to the ideas and oratory of a few leaders. As a result the focal point of consciousness was, in the beginning, generally an abstract and theoretical right which logic deduced from some traditional source. In the ante-bellum period,

<sup>45</sup> Horace Greeley to J. Medill, July 24, 1858, in John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York, 1890), II, 140-41n.; George A. Nourse to Trumbull, January 1, 1858, J. A. Berdon to Trumbull, March 2, 1858, and William H. Herndon to Trumbull, April 12, 1858, Trumbull Papers; Jacob Marsh to Elihu Washburn, April 28, 1858, Washburn Papers (MSS. in Library of Congress); L. E. Chittenden to T. H. Dudley, November 1, 1860, Dudley Papers (MSS. in Huntington Library).

<sup>46</sup> See details as developed in Avery O. Craven, *Edmund Ruffin, Southerner* (New York, 1932). The purpose of this paper is to suggest an approach to the whole problem and since this has been done here in some detail for the North, and elsewhere by the writer for the South, it has not been thought necessary to suggest more than the larger outline. This should not imply a sectional prejudice.

when farmers, who lived by staple crops, felt the sting of poverty, these spokesmen, under the influence of Old World agrarian thinking, voiced protest in terms of local government versus central government made strong by the power to grant economic favors.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, industry and commerce, largely centering in the North, were, by tariffs and centralization, profiting at the expense of the nation's real producers. Before long Southerners were calculating the millions of dollars tribute paid to this "Lord North" and were talking of being in a state of colonial dependence.

The remedy was found in a strict adherence to the Constitution. Yankee traits could be controlled and Southern rights be preserved by a series of phrases, on the meaning of which not even the framers could agree. The section had begun to chop logic; it was the champion of things as they were,—a conscious minority in a republican system. Yet in its own eyes, the South was the defender of democratic government against the onslaughts of those who would distort sacred institutions in order to promote their own material interests. All that the Revolution had won, all that "the Fathers" had achieved, was involved in the struggle.

When opposition to slavery developed, a new threat of economic loss, now joined with fear of racial conflict and social unrest, was added. When that drive became a moral attack on the whole Southern way of life, the defense broadened in proportion and emotions deepened. The Constitution was not enough against those who would not respect its provisions; the whole South must become unified for political efficiency. The section must have that security which the Constitution guaranteed and an equal right to expand with its institutions *as a matter of principle*. Keen minds set to work to reveal the virtues in slavery and the life it permitted in the South. When they had finished a stratified society, with Negro "mud-sills" at the bottom, alone permitted genuine republican government, escaped the ills of labor and race conflict, gave

<sup>47</sup> John Taylor, *Tyranny Unmasked* (Washington, 1822), and *Construction Construed and Constitutions Vindicated* (Richmond, 1820); Jesse T. Carpenter, *The South as a Conscious Minority, 1789-1861* (New York, 1930).

widest opportunity for ability and culture, and truly forwarded the cause of civilization.<sup>48</sup> The stability and quiet under such a system were contrasted with the restless strife of the North which was developing socialism and threatening the destruction of security in person and in property. The Southern way of life was the way of order and progress.

Here was something else worth fighting to preserve. The old struggle against "King Numbers," which in large part had been won at home, must go on. But the field had broadened and the struggle was against a foe more base and self-seeking. Both the system of republican government and the cause of civilization were bound up in the struggle.

Early efforts at unified defense proved futile because the masses, with cotton and the hopes it gave, could not muster the emotional response to leaders sufficient for action. They neither felt the inferiority suggested by economic dependence nor the compelling force of rights which gave no practical returns. They gladly accepted compromise in 1850, and were surprisingly unmoved throughout the next eight years. Leaders might support the fruitless Kansas-Nebraska Bill, as the Richmond *Enquirer* said, "solely for the reason that it would vindicate the equality and sovereignty of the states."<sup>49</sup> But the masses, to quote one individual, were "not a particle" excited. They knew, as this writer put it, that the struggle was over "a shadow."<sup>50</sup> Their outlook was as yet practical.

But the John Brown raid was another matter. It put reality into the much discussed program of Yankee "money-changers," "peasant farmers," and the "long haired men and short haired women" of the North. The sharpest resentments and deepest fears of which a people were capable broke loose. A race war was impending. And that was a poor man's problem. Albert G. Brown of Mississippi put it this way:<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> William S. Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1935).

<sup>49</sup> Richmond *Enquirer*, March 10, 1854.

<sup>50</sup> Josiah Evans to B. F. Perry, January 19, 1858, Perry Papers (MSS. in Alabama Department of Archives and History); Jonathan Worth to John A. Gilmer, March 9, 1858, in J. G. de R. Hamilton (ed.), *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth* (Raleigh, 1909), I, 55.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by Percy L. Rainwater, "The Presidential Canvass of 1860 in Mississippi," *Journal of the Mississippi State Bar*, V (1933), 279-80.

The rich will flee the country. . . . Then the non-slaveholder will begin to see what his real fate is. The Negro will intrude into his preserve . . . insist on being treated as an equal . . . that he shall go to the white man's bed, and the white man his . . . that his son shall marry the white man's daughter, and the white man's daughter his son. In short that they shall live on terms of perfect social equality. The non-slaveholder will, of course, reject the terms. Then will commence a war of races such as has marked the history of San Domingo.

The triumph of the Republican party, sectional and containing, as it did, men as rabid as Sumner and as vague and shifting as Seward and Lincoln, drove the more inflamed Southerners to secession. Lincoln's refusal of compromise and his handling of Fort Sumter forced conservatives to follow. War had become inevitable. Fear and hate had taken charge.

By May, 1861, that staunch lover of the Union, Jonathan Worth, could write from peaceable old Randolph County in North Carolina: "The voice of reason is silenced. Furious passion and thirst for blood consume the air. . . . Nobody is allowed to retain and assert his reason. The cartridge box is preferred to the ballot box. The very women and children are for war."<sup>52</sup>

A little later the New York *Herald* solemnly reported from the battlefield of Bull Run that Southern "fiends in human shape have taken the bayonets and knives of our wounded and dying soldiers and thrust them into their hearts and left them sticking there, and some of the Louisiana Zouaves have severed the heads of our dead from their bodies, and amused themselves by kicking them as footballs."<sup>53</sup>

The old Carolinian at Appomattox was right. It is a serious thing to love a country!

<sup>52</sup> Worth to Gaius Winingham, May 20, 1861, in Hamilton (ed.), *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, I, 149.

<sup>53</sup> New York *Herald*, July 24, 1861.